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SUBJECT: Niger: ECOWAS Mediator Provides Update

Ref: a) Niamey 0096, b) Niamey 0048, c) Niamey 0029, d) Niamey 0025,  
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11. (SBU) Summary: On February 9, ECOWAS Mediator for Niger General (retired) and former head of state Abdulsalami Abubakar received Charge to discuss the status of mediation talks between Niger's main opposition group, the Coordination of Forces for Democracy and the Republic (CFDR) and the Government of Niger (GON). General Abubakar was frank, stating that "one man" stood between the current state of affairs and progress on restoring democracy. He added that President Tandja insists that the August 4 referendum, the 6th Republic Constitution, the new Cabinet, and the new National Assembly be respected and not rolled back. General Abubakar noted that the Opposition had offered several ideas about the disposition of the three-year interim period, which it saw as an opportunity for a political transition, but admitted that the GON's point of view appeared fixed in a "6th Republic focus." General Abubakar will soon prepare a report to be submitted to the ECOWAS Heads of State and Government Summit on February 16. End summary.

#### INDP Resumes, Plenary Sessions Held

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12. (SBU) On February 3, ECOWAS Mediator for Niger General (retired) and former head of state Abdulsalami Abubakar returned to Niamey from the AU Summit and meetings on Sudan to reconvene the Inter-Nigerien Political Dialogue (INDP). After separate meetings with both the GON and the Opposition during the period from February 4 - 8, he presided on February 8 in the afternoon and then on February 9 twice over plenary sessions at the Palais des Congres. Between the two plenary sessions on February 9, General Abubakar received the Charge, Pol Officer, and Pol Specialist at the adjacent Hotel Gaweye.

#### Mediator Aboubakar Outlines Opposition Objectives

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13. (SBU) General Abubakar stated that the Opposition rejects the constitution of the 6th Republic and deriving institutions. He said the Opposition proposes a nine-month transition under an inclusive "national reconciliation government," with President Tandja serving as a largely ceremonial president, a consensus prime minister and cabinet, a transitional parliament, and a counsel to draft a new constitution. Abubakar noted, however, that the GON's notion of a transition would be to include the Opposition in the GON during the three-year extension period from 2009-2012, during which President Tandja remains in power under the 6th Republic Constitution.

#### Mediator Abubakar on African Union Non-Role

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14. (SBU) General Abubakar expressed concern that Niger was not on the agenda of the January 31 - February 2 African Union (AU) Summit.

He stated that the AU had not taken up Niger's political crisis in late 2009 as it benefited from the protection of then-Chair Libyan President Muammar Qadhafi. He added that when Qadhafi came to visit Niger in March 2009, he did nothing to dissuade President Tandja from staying in office beyond the term permitted by the 1999 Constitution; on the contrary, he encouraged President Tandja to finish his "special projects," deriding the constitution as "nothing but a piece of paper."

#### The Elusive Notion of African Statesmanship

15. (SBU) In reaction to the demands of some that President Tandja be allowed to remain in office to conclude his "special projects" (the Kandadji Dam, the abattoir, the Zinder refinery, Niamey's second bridge over the Niger River, the Imouraren uranium mines, and the dry port at Dosso), General Abubakar stated that he sees no reason why any future president would not continue these projects. To him, President Tandja did not risk anything by graciously stepping down from power at the end of his second term, which was the understanding of the political class. He also recalled that Opposition leaders said that if President Tandja had left office when his second term ended on December 22, he would have been hailed as a "Father of the Nation" and "Shepherd of Nigerien Democracy" during the December 18 Republic Day celebrations in Diffa, capital of President Tandja's home region. Instead, he had not chosen the path toward statesmanship.

#### Mediator Abubakar: Pres. Tandja Holds Cards

16. (SBU) General Abubakar admitted that prospects for an agreement are doubtful at best and that President Tandja "holds the cards" in this crisis. He said, "one man" stood between the current state of

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affairs and progress. Abubakar doubted that the GON would provide an opportunity for the mediation process to assist Niger. President Tandja, he said, "...is the main problem, and could be the solution." He added that members of President Tandja's camp have no voice and are just mouthpieces for him. He observed, "They (the GON delegation) cannot make a decision without referring to Tandja for instructions...I don't think he has delegated (decision making) powers to them. Several parties have contracted a marriage of convenience (with President Tandja), and they are trying to save their skin." He went on to say that he hoped that the U.S. Government and the European Union would put more pressure on President Tandja to reach a political agreement. Abubakar stated that as the food security situation becomes increasingly worrisome in coming months, things could take a turn for the worse. "A hungry man is an angry man," he observed.

#### ECOWAS Summit: Mediator to Report on Progress

17. (SBU) General Abubakar advised that he would return to Abuja on February 10 and would prepare a report to be submitted to the ECOWAS Heads of State and Government Summit on February 16. He is uncertain as to the date of an anticipated next round of the INDP, but stated that he would be available for further discussion on the process.

#### Comment

18. (SBU) Regrettably, the discussion with Mediator Aboubakar provided no suggestion that a means had been found to surpass the ongoing political stalemate. The GON's position appears to be observing the status quo, while the Opposition wishes to use the three-year extension of President Tandja's term of office as a transitional period during which key GON institutions would be rolled back and reformed. As democracy would be restored, the Opposition would work to draft a new, consultative constitution. The Opposition's main objective appears to be to skip from the 6th Republic to a 7th Republic as quickly as possible, with governmental institutions restored that are inclusive. On the eve of his departure, Mediator Aboubakar provided both sides with his proposal for a political transition, which will be discussed in septel. End comment.

Whitaker